

Battery Powered

Who built the electric truck?

Scott Ankeny hasn't made an electric car, but his electric pickup truck can go 70 mph.

Ankeny, a mechanic at Wagon Works in Eugene, got the instructions from a kit, bought a used Toyota pickup and a lot (24 in all) of six volt golf cart batteries. He uses his battery-powered truck to drive to work in Eugene from Junction City and to run errands.

But unlike many plug-in cars that are small and almost toy-like in appearance, Ankeny's truck can carry a big load in the pickup's bed.

Hidden beneath the truck bed are 17 of the batteries used to power the vehicle. The rest are stashed beneath the hood. They come to a total of 144 volts, a fact that is labeled on the side of truck and under the hood to alert rescuers in case of an accident.

There's no evidence to suggest electric cars are more dangerous in an accident than gasoline or diesel vehicles. According to Electro Automotive, a maker of conversion kits to create battery powered cars, electric vehicles have a number of safety measures designed to easily cut off the current in case of an accident.

Ankeny's truck also sports a sticker made by his daughter proclaiming the truck "sun-driven." He purchased solar

panels to produce energy for the truck.

Eugeneans may be familiar with the concept of the electric car from the 2006 documentary *Who Killed the Electric Car?* (review at www.eugeneweekly.com/2006/08/17/movie1.html) which examined General Motors' recall and destruction of its electric car, the EV1. Other major automakers like Ford and Honda also made, then terminated the use of, electric cars.

GM is trying to make up for its electric car faux pas by introducing the Chevy Volt, a concept hybrid car that runs on a combination of batteries and an engine that runs on E85 ethanol. GM says the Volt will go into production in 2010.

Rather than wait for automakers to start going green, Ankeny decided to get a used truck and build an electric auto of his own.

Ankeny's battery electric vehicle is not to be confused with hybrid cars such as the Prius. Hybrid cars combine an internal combustion engine, usually slightly smaller than a regular gasoline engine, with a rechargeable electric battery.

Driving a Prius has become a status symbol for the environmentally conscious.



According to the *New York Times*, many people choose to buy a Prius instead of other makes of hybrid car because driving a Prius makes a "green statement."

A Prius has 90 percent less smog-forming emissions than the average car. Ankeny's electric truck has no emissions at all.

Ankeny replaced the Toyota's engine and exhaust system with batteries. Instead of refueling at a gas station, he pulls up to an electrical outlet. Since there's no gas engine, his truck runs silently. He installed a green light on the dashboard so he would know when the truck is turned on. Instead of a gas tank, Ankeny has a meter that shows how much charge he has left.

"The truck goes slower as the charge gets lower," he said.

His "retirement dream" is to mount solar panels on the truck and "go camping

and fishing while the truck charges up," he said.

The drawback to the truck is the limited distance it can be driven. But for reducing pollution on short trips, its clean power can only be beaten by a bicycle. And you can't throw a couple hundred pounds of gardening supplies on the back of most bikes.

According to greencars.com, short trips while your engine is cold create more air pollution because it takes time for your emissions-reducing catalytic converter to heat up and start working. With no emissions at all, this is not an issue for the electric truck.

It takes about seven hours for the batteries to fully recharge, and Ankeny expects to be able to drive 80 miles a charge. That's not enough to drive to Portland, but it is plenty of juice for his commute.

He has high hopes that newer lithium ion batteries will solve the problem. They take up less space, and Ankeny said an electric car with them installed "can go 250 miles a charge."

By using solar and wind powered energy for his charges, Ankeny is able to power his truck on clean energy, and with zero emissions, he's not creating air pollution.

Ankeny does hope to build an electric car someday soon. He just needs a car with enough room for all those batteries. **EW**



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